Quick Withdrawal Of Mideast Force Defended by Thant
By RAYMOND DANIELL Special to The New York Times
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UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., June 4 — Secretary General Thant said today that his decision on May 18 to order the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force as a buffer between the Israelis and Egyptians had been dictated by "legal and practical considerations of an overriding nature."

The Secretary General has been accused in Washington and other capitals of acceding too readily to an Egyptian request to remove the peace-keeping force, which had preserved tranquillity on the border between the United Arab Republic and Israel since the Suez crisis in 1956.

In a statement Mr. Thant asserted that, legally, he had no choice but to agree to the United Arab Republic's request, which he said was not "an ultimatum." From a practical point of view, he said, to have delayed would have endangered the lives of members of the international force, supplied by Brazil, Canada, Denmark, In-

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Thant Defends Quick Mideast Force Withdrawal

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dia, Norway, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

Even before he issued his withdrawal order, Mr. Thant said, the countries with contingents in the peace-keeping force informed him of their intention to pull out. Troops of the Egyptian Army, he said, had interposed themselves between the peace-keeping force and the Israeli border.

The Secretary General took issue with those who contend that his order for withdrawal was "a primary cause of the present crisis." This view, he said, ignores the fact that the "underlying basis for this and other crisis situations in the Near East is the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict, which has been present all along, and of which the crisis situation created by the unexpected request for the withdrawal of U.N.E.F. is the latest expression."

Mr. Thant pointed out that negotiations on the issue of the Egyptians' right to terminate the forces' presence on their territory delayed its arrival for several days in November, 1956.

Once the request for removal of the force was received, Mr. Thant said, he could accept or reject the request or could "deliberately delay" his response.

"In the considered opinion of the Secretary General," he said, "the latter two courses in the existing circumstances would have served no purpose other than to worsen an already explosive situation, and might also have had disastrous results as regards the safety of the United Nations force."

The Secretary General said he was convinced that any attempt to induce Cairo to reverse its decision would be rebuffed. In fact, he said, ominous expressions such as "army of occupation" were being used in Cairo, and "they could have been magnified and justified if U.N.E.F. had sought to stay beyond its welcome with the predictable hostile public reaction to the presence of the force."

The Secretary General's statement noted that he had expressed, from the outset of the present crisis, his "deep misgivings" about the consequences of a withdrawal of the peace-keeping force.

"These misgivings have also been expressed more than once in recent years in the Secretary General's annual report to the General Assembly, when the continued existence of U.N.E.F. was being threatened through the dwindling and increasing uncertainty of funds," he said.

Mr. Thant said that the United Nations troops were in Egypt to maintain peace, and that the force was not armed or prepared for combat. They carried only small arms to be used in self-defense, Mr. Thant said. He stressed that it was a peace-keeping operation, established by the General Assembly and not by the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for undertaking enforcement action.

Mr. Thant said the international force was intended by the Assembly to take up positions on the Israeli as well as the Egyptian side of the border. However, he noted, Israel refused to have members of the international force on her territory on the ground that it would mean a surrender of some degree of sovereignty. Consequently, it had been stationed only on the Egyptian side of the border.

"It may be pointed out in passing that over the years U.N.E.F. dealt with numerous infiltrators coming from the Israeli as well as from the United Arab Republic side of the line," Mr. Thant said.

"It would hardly be logical to take the position that, because U.N.E.F. has successfully maintained quiet along the line for more than 10 years, due in large measure to the cooperation of the United Arab Republic authorities, the United Arab Republic Government should now be told that it cannot unilaterally seek the removal of the force and thus be penalized for long cooperation with the international community in the interest of peace.

"There are other practical factors relating to the above-mentioned arrangement which are highly relevant to the withdrawal of U.N.E.F. First, once the United Arab Republic troops moved up to the line to place themselves in confrontation with the military forces of Israel, U.N.E.F. had, in fact, no further useful function.

"Secondly, if the force was no longer welcome it could not as a practical matter remain in the United Arab Republic, since the friction which would almost inevitably have arisen with the United Arab Republic Government, armed forces and the local population would have made the situation of the force both humiliating and untenable."

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